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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2018

TAGS: PTER PGOV PREL CO VE

SUBJECT: BRV YET TO REACT TO ID OF FARC FIGHTERS IN  
VENEZUELA

REF: CARACAS 00349

Classified By: Veronica Torres, Acting Political Counselor,  
for Reasons 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Claims and counter-claims regarding the identities of two presumed FARC fighters (REFTEL) seeking medical care in Venezuela have been reported in the media since March 11. On March 14, the Colombian Defense Minister identified the two men as FARC fighters "Lucas" and "Jaime," apparently based on fingerprints provided to Colombia by Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro. Colombia requested their hand-over by Venezuelan authorities. As of yet, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) officials have not issued a public response to Colombia's transfer request nor a definitive statement as to the identity of the individuals. Whether foot soldiers or members of the FARC Secretariat, how Venezuela handles this will have an effect on their relations with Colombia and may invite further scrutiny of the BRV's links to the FARC. END SUMMARY.

#### Counter-Claims and Speculation

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¶2. (SBU) Minister of Interior and Justice Ramon Rodriguez Chacin announced March 12 that Interpol and the Government of Colombia (GOC) had confirmed the fingerprints of Jesus Castro did not match those of FARC Secretariat member Milton Jesus Toncel AKA "Joaquin Gomez". The Minister, whom President Chavez had named his "Ambassador to the FARC", went on to add that the identities of the two men remained a mystery and suggested that the men could be "criminals, foreign day laborers, or Ecuadorians." The Colombian intelligence service (DAS) quickly denied Chacin's claim, stating that the fingerprints received were unusable. Chacin replied that "somebody named Velasquez" from Interpol Colombia received the prints and later made "a verbal report" that it was not Joaquin Gomez. Colombian officials offered to take their own prints but Chacin dismissed that request on March 13, suggesting ulterior motives when he said, "who knows with what intention they will interrogate or question" Castro.

#### A TWIST AND A TURN

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¶3. (SBU) According to the local press, on March 13 Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo said Foreign Minister Maduro had offered to send new sets of fingerprints via Interpol. The following day, Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos identified the two men as FARC fighters. Santos said Castro's real name is Freddy Martinez, alias "Lucas," while Ortiz, alias "Jaime," correctly identified himself to Venezuelan authorities. Santos added that "Lucas" served on the General Staff of the FARC's 38th front. Upon being

injured in a battle in Colombia, FARC fighters were instructed to take "Lucas" into Venezuela so he could seek medical care, Santos said. The Colombian minister also announced that "Jaime" is wanted by GOC authorities on "rebellion" charges. Santos noted that the men's identify was confirmed using fingerprints, presumably those offered by Maduro. Santos added that the GOC would await the transfer of the two men by Venezuelan authorities. Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) officials have yet to make public statements regarding the GOC's transfer request.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Whether foot soldiers or senior members of the FARC, President Chavez may have to choose between turning over these two FARC members or providing further evidence to suggest a BRV relationship with the FARC. END COMMENT.

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